

[HOME \(/\)](#) > [ALUMNI](#)

Letter from Cliff Mount '79 about AlumniFire

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ON MENTORING

By Clifton M. Mount, Esquire

“Oh, you were in THAT CLASS????!!!”

Yep. Class of 1979. 50th Anniversary Class, and quite possibly the most overall irreverent class to grace the halls of the BAC. We fought back against injustice. No shortage of brain power in those 65 or so, heads. History has born this out. Yalies, Stanfords, plenty of Dukies, UVA.

No shortage of J.D.'s behind names these days. Some M.D.'s. Of course, in the mid to late '70's we all wanted to be rock and roll stars (some of us still do!).

Football, and the English Department kept me out of trouble. Cliff Black, Charlie Campbell, Ed and Ann Sundt (Her Honor), Pete Swinehart. Blew away my undergraduate English Department. Got words and reading going in my head to where I apparently was a pretty well-respected writer in my undergrad. Ahhhh, law school bound. Reading and writing. Have also maintained the athletic side.

30 some years later as a trial lawyer, (yes, there is a distinction between having picked over 75 juries and being a “litigator”). The late Jake Stein wrote about the difference.

So, about February 2022, I receive an email from a young man who introduces himself as a recent Landon grad, his uncles are practicing lawyers, and his grandfather was a judge. Could he have an hour of my time to discuss a legal career, and opening my own firm. Of course. I do this sort of thing for my law school routinely as a member of the Board of Visitors, and a grateful, and proud Deac.

The one hour ZOOM easily turned into two (he is in undergraduate school in Scotland). The young man impressed me with his astute questions, easy going, polite, yet not afraid to laugh demeanor, and the fact he wore a jacket and tie. When I say "astute," easily as astute as many young law students I have informally advised, recommended for jobs, mock interviewed, and so on.

The next morning, like clockwork, a "Thank You" email in my in box. At the end of this display of good, professional manners, a request to intern in my office this past summer.

Done.

Young Tom Mearns, however, was told he would not be working unpaid. I put some terms in a brief letter agreement and included an express paragraph not only to expose him to a real-life civil trial practice, but a promise on my part to take time to discuss questions he might have, give guidance, informally teach.

My original thoughts had been to see if a Wake Law student wanted to spend some time in my office. Tom beat them to the punch.

At one point, I asked Tom how he found me. Tom said he saw my website on the Landon Alumni Fire platform. I, quite frankly, had forgotten I even signed on to it. Tom told me his mother had suggested Tom start making network connections. The Landon Alumni Fire platform was a natural. Tom was only in the middle of his freshman year (they call it something else in the U.K.).

I did not set out to "mentor." From my father, I have apparently inherited his interest in the next generations. What is the future going to look like? The young man asked me for a job. I have done so many times in my work career. People have been kind enough to help me.

I have developed a friendly relationship with Mike McCabe in the Landon Development Office. Tom Mearns has proved to me what Mike has said to me: "There is an enormous talent pool amongst younger Bears. Mike's vision is that older Bears (I use the word "older" gently, as in a "gently used book") tap into the talent pool from an institution that impacted all of us, and bring along some of the younger guys. The younger Bears could quite possibly contribute to your business in return, as Tom Mearns did to mine this past summer.

Those of us who grew up here know the DMV is really a small town. Those of us who grew up here generally make up the entire population of Landon. Unbeknownst to me, Mike recently published a blurb about Tom working in my office. Tom excitedly sent it to me. I thanked Mike. I asked if it would help his vision if I wrote something. I have.

Every single one of us have had a helping hand or two in this life. Why not start at home.